

OSMANLI'DA TOPLUM, ŞEHİR VE TİCARET

-IV-

Erkan İSİKTAS

Muhammet Nuri TUNÇ



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Kitabın Adı : OSMANLI'DA TOPLUM, ŞEHİR VE TİCARET -IV-
Editörler : Erkan İŞIKTAŞ, Muhammet Nuri TUNÇ
Yazarlar : Abdulsasir YİNER, Adem ÇALIŞKAN, Avni LÜTFİOĞLU, Emrah YILMAZ,
Erkan İŞIKTAŞ, Melahat ARIKAN, Muhammet Nuri TUNÇ,
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Recep DÜNDAR, Rümeyza KARS, Seyfettin KAYA, Uğur DEMLİKOĞLU,
Ümmet SOYDEMİR, Ünal TAŞKIN
Kapak / Mizanpaj : Yağmur ARDUÇ
Kapak Resmi : <https://sehirplanlama.ibb.istanbul/beyoglu-arsivi-fotografilar/>

1. Baskı : Aralık 2024 ANKARA

Yayın Koordinatörü : Ceyda ŞEREFLİOĞLU
Yayın Yönetmeni : Selva ALİM
ISBN : 978-625-5537-40-9
Yayın No. : 2750

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YEZIDIS IN AND AROUND MOSUL

Murat Gökhan DALYAN*

Muhammet Nuri TUNÇ**

Who are Yezidis?

The origin of the Yezidis is still a subject of debate today. In the 18th and 19th centuries, missionaries, based on similarities, stated that this community was one of the ancient Iranian communities and that they belonged to the Yezdanism faith or that they were descendants of the ancient Sabians. It is known that the name Sabii, who are said to be from Harran or to have lived in this region, comes from Arabic or is related to Arabic. In addition, if it is accepted that Sabism is the oldest origin of Yezidism, according to the belief system, the holy temple should be in this region instead of Lalish. However, this is not the case. It is generally thought that the Sabis belonged to Assyrian, Semitic and other ancient cultures¹. However, a comprehensive comparison with them and their beliefs has not been made. It is also claimed that they were Armenians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Arabs, Kurds and even Turks². However, the language they speak, the caste system in their structure, which is not found in Middle Eastern societies, and their belief in reincarnation suggest that this community is Indo-European and therefore of Indian origin.

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1 Henri Lammens, “Le massif du Gabal Sim’an et les Yézidis de Syrie”, *Mélange de la Faculté Orientale*, 2, 1907, p. 366; Erol Sever, *Yezidilik ve Yezidilerin Kökeni*, Berfin Yayınları, İstanbul 2006, pp. 27-28.

2 M. Joachim Menant, *Les Yézidiz; épisodes de l’histoire des adorateurs du diable*, Paris 1892, pp. 47-48.

The missionaries generally implied that the Yezidis, especially the Manichees, were the only surviving representatives of a widespread heresy which, in their opinion, had been proven in the early days³. For their part, the Yezidis themselves, including Prince Anwar Mu'awiya Ismail, the head of the Yezidi Religious Centre, identify themselves as Assyrian and Babylonian, not Kurdish, and reject claims that they are of Kurdish origin⁴. Muawiya bin Al Yezidi, on the other hand, defines himself as a follower of Azday and Zoroaster from Iran. This statement shows that Yezidis are nourished from Iranian lands in terms of origin, culture and history⁵.

According to some Yezidis, they are aware that if they accept Kurdishness, the concept of Yezidism will disappear in time. However, there are also those who think that a common living space can be created in the future together with Kurdish nationalists who have difficulty in constructing a past history. In addition, the difficulties that Yezidis have suffered in the past because of Sunni Kurds and the negative feelings of Sunni Kurds towards Yezidi beliefs are only softening between the two sides with the secularisation of Kurdish nationalists and the breaking of the influence of Islam in society with nationalist discourses⁶. In our opinion, the origin of a community can be understood from its totems and culture. Accordingly, Yezidis are one of the last masses of people who migrated from India between the 11th and 13th centuries. The caste system that exists in Indian society, the belief in reincarnation, their blessing of the sun, the fact that it is forbidden for them to shave their beards and moustaches like Sikhs, the fact that they attach special importance to the snake figure, which has an important place in Indian culture, and respect it enough to paint it on the door of their temples, the similarity of the peacock lamps in temples in India with the peacock vases they call banners, their skin colour and their fondness for the fig plant and its fruit, whose homeland is India, make us think of this⁷. According to the Frenchman Menant, who wrote

3 J. P. Fletcher, *Narrative of a Two Years' Residence at Nineveh and Travels in Mesopotamia, Assyria, and Syria*, Vol I, London 1850, p. 241.

4 Erol Sever, *ibid.*, pp. 127-128.

5 Richard Foltz, *Religions of Iran: From Prehistory to the Present*, London 2013, pp. 220-221, 225, 227; Erol Sever, *ibid.*, pp. 120-126.

6 Sabiha Banu Yalkut, *Melek Tavus'un Halkı Yezidiler*, Çev. Sabir Yücersoy, Siyah Beyaz Metis Güncel Yayınları, İstanbul 2006, pp.62, 73.

7 Isya Joseph, *Devil Worship The Sacred Books And Traditions Of The Yezidiz*, Boston 1919, pp. 139, 200.

a book about the Yezidis in 1892 and asked for help for them, the Yezidis stated that although they spoke the same language as the Kurds, they were of a different race than the Kurds and their skin was perhaps a little too brown, but their faces were extremely beautiful. This suggests that there was another affinity with the Indian culture and race⁸. As a matter of fact, Mija Sanders, one of the recent researchers, states that some members of the Yezidi community in America were surprised by the similarity of the symbols in Hindu temples they encountered with their own culture and that they expressed that their origins could be Indian. It is known that the Indians also stated that the Yezidis had migrated from India and took some of the Yezidi leaders to India. Mija also states that there are chat groups on social networks where thousands of Yezidi-Indians participate. The common point of both groups is that they are anti-Islam and anti-Muslim⁹.

Finally, it is known that this community, which was known as Yezidi from the Ottoman period until the last decade and defined as “Yezidi” in almost all foreign and local sources of the 19th and 20th centuries, has recently started to use the form “Ezidi” used by the Yezidis for themselves instead of the more commonly used “Yezidi” in order to get rid of the negative effect due to their antipathetic naming and understanding in the Muslim and Alevi society, as stated by Philip G. Kreyenbroek, an expert on this subject. By calling themselves “Ezidi” instead of “Yezidi”, Kurdish nationalists prevent the reaction of Kurds, Alevis and Muslims in our country and bring to mind the expression of oppressed and victimised. In addition, the fact that the letters “Y” and “E” have the same linguistic correspondences facilitates this change in nomenclature. Otherwise, it is very difficult for the Sunni and Alevi communities to develop a positive attitude towards this community, which depicts Satan as an angel who considers the killing of Hz. Hussein as permissible, due to the historical past. Therefore, the new nomenclature of the community is politically favourable for themselves and Kurdish nationalists. According to this understanding, the name Yezidi is no longer used by Kurdish nationalists to describe the community.

8 M. Joachim Menant, *ibid*, pp. 46-48.

9 Mija Sanders, “Yezidis in ancient India, or Indians in ancient Mesopotamia?: Re-imagining Ancient Yezidi Origins”, *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, 2019, Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 68-82

According to the earliest Ottoman records dated November 1579, Yezidis came to Mosul and its surroundings later. As a matter of fact, the archive record in question; “*Yezîdî tâyifesiychün hırsuz ve harâmî ve kuttâ‘u‘î-tarîk olub bu diyâra gelüb temekkün idelden berü*” This statement indicates that the Yezidis were not among the original inhabitants of the region. Subsequently, the Yezidis, who migrated to the region at a later point in time, settled in a vast expanse of territory extending from the northern reaches of Iraq to Diyarbakır. The Yezidis, who are estimated to comprise approximately 2,000 households (or 10,000 individuals), inhabited a range of locations across Iraq, including Mosul, Erbil, Imadiye, Sinjar, Bacvan, Zab Water, and areas between Uhush and Sultan Abdullah in Baghdad and Mosul. In summary, the Yezidis resided in various regions across Baghdad and Shahrizor provinces¹⁰.

Mosul City and Yezidis

Ibn Battuta visited the Sinjar region during his famous journey and provided important information about its geography and demography. He noted that the Sinjar region was very fertile and that the region was famous for its number of mosques and its spiritual influence. The fact that Battûta does not give any information about the Yezidis in his work, while mentioning Mount Sinjar and its surroundings in the 14th century, is an important data supporting the idea that this community did not live in the region at that time. Indeed, considering the activities of the Yezidis in the region in the 16th century, if the same community had lived in the region in the 14th century, it would be inconceivable that a marginal community with such activities would have escaped Battûta’s attention or that he would not have mentioned them. Moreover, as Battûta mentions, Sinjar had a very remarkable Islamic identity in the 14th century. It can be said that this identity of the region probably suffered a significant blow after the Yezidis came to the region.¹¹

In 1568, Sultan Hussein, the Judge of Imadiyah, dispatched a missive to Istanbul, wherein he attested to the arrival of Yezidis in Mosul and its environs. He further observed that the region was beset by persistent public order

¹⁰ BOA. Mühimme Defteri (A. {DVNSMHM.d.) nr. 39, p. 2, hkm.6 (06 Şevval 987 – 26 Kasım 1579); Mühimme Defteri nr. 7, p. 706, hkm.1942 (25 Safer 976 – 19 Ağustos 1568).

¹¹ Ebû Abdullah Muhammed İbn Battûta Tancî, *İbn Battûta Seyahanâmesi*, YKY. Yayınları, İstanbul 2020, s.231.

concerns following their incursion. Sultan Hussein additionally noted that the Yezidis had perpetrated acts of theft and thieving, had disrupted transportation infrastructure, and had inflicted harm upon Muslims and state-owned property¹². Indeed, in the late 16th century, the Yazidi Dasni and Sheikhan clans were the primary instigators of banditry activities. In particular, the Dasni clan was notorious for its criminal activities, including house raiding, murder, property extortion, and disrupting trade routes. These actions were so prevalent that they could not be effectively deterred or prevented. Indeed, the objective was to annex them to Mosul and thus prevent them from causing harm to the people of the province. In order to foster amicable relations with the Yezidis and to guarantee public order in the areas where they were concentrated, the Ottoman approach of maintaining public order by appointing the prominent leaders of the troublemakers as administrators was employed. However, this strategy proved ineffective. Ali, who was appointed as bey of the Kashaf sanjak, was probably appointed with the expectation that he would ensure public order. However, his appointment, as a member of the Dasni tribe, had the opposite effect, leading to an increase in banditry¹³. In order to put an end to the banditry of the Yezidis, who caused significant distress to the people of the region and damage to state revenues, decisions were taken to transfer them from Mosul and its surroundings and to resettle them in other regions. However, there were difficulties in implementing this decision, and the desired result could not be obtained¹⁴. The Yezidis persisted in their continued existence in Mosul and its surrounding areas for a considerable length of time. In the 18th and 19th centuries, it is understood that the banditry of the Yezidis persisted, placing the state in a challenging position. Indeed, as evidenced in a document pertaining to Yezidi banditry in the early nineteenth century, it was asserted that since the region's conquest, the Yezidis had persistently defied the state, engaging in persistent banditry and ultimately becoming a rebellious nation¹⁵.

In addition to these activities, the fact that the Yezidis perpetrated attacks, particularly against Sunni Muslims, and justified these actions on the grounds

¹² BOA. Mühimme Defteri nr. 7, p. 706, hkm.1942 (25 Safer 976 – 19 Ağustos 1568).

¹³ BOA. Mühimme Defteri nr. 31, p. 195, hkm.438 (09 Cemaziyelahir 985 – 24 Ağustos 1577); BOA. Mühimme Defteri nr. 36, p. 202, hkm.543 (20 Safer 987 – 18 Nisan 1579).

¹⁴ BOA. Mühimme Defteri nr. 7, p. 706, hkm.1942 (25 Safer 976 – 19 Ağustos 1568).

¹⁵ BOA. HAT. 80/3319 (07 Zilkade 1220 – 27 Ocak 1806).

that “the property of Sunnis is halal for us” contributed to a growing negative perception of them by the state. In official correspondence about the Yezidis, it was repeatedly asserted that they lacked a religion and adherence to Islam. They were characterised as a sectarian group, lacking in prayer and in violation of Islamic tradition by engaging in relationships with women who were not their wives¹⁶. The Yezidis’ beliefs, which are not aligned with Islamic teachings, and their involvement in banditry in the region have caused distress to other ethnic groups and travellers. Consequently, various measures have been taken to influence them to change their ways, yet these have not been effective¹⁷.

While historical sources offer insight into the negative activities of the Yezidis, there is also a wealth of information available about their social, economic, and religious lives. This information can be found in both archival sources and in the works of local and Western travellers. This study will analyse the impact of the Yezidis, who have inhabited and continued to populate the Mosul area throughout their history, on the city of Mosul and the impact of Mosul on the social, cultural and commercial lives of the Yezidis.

Mosul City

It is not known exactly how long the Yazidi community has been living in Mosul, which is one of the oldest cities and settlements in Mesopotamia¹⁸. However, documents from the period show that the Yezidis came under Ottoman protection in the 16th century and that the Ottomans treated them favourably. In the 16th century, at the beginning of Ottoman rule in Iraq and its neighbourhood, the state rulers even gave high-ranking provincial civil service positions to Yazidi notables from the region. In 1577, for example, the administrator of Kashaf Sanjak is said to have been Ali Bey, a Yazidi from Dasni¹⁹. This situation continued in the following period. In the first half of the 17th century, Mirza Bey of Dasni’s was one of the people who served as sanjakbey in Mosul²⁰.

¹⁶ Mühimme Defteri nr. 29, p. 85, hkm.205 (26 Şevval 984 – 16 Ocak 1577); Mühimme Defteri nr. 31, p. 257, hkm. 568 (2 Receb 985 – 15 Eylül 1577).

¹⁷ Mühimme Defteri nr. 39, p. 2, hkm.6 (06 Şevval 987 – 26 Kasım 1579).

¹⁸ M. l’abbé P. Martin, *La Chaldée, esquisse historique suivie de quelques réflexions sur l’Orient*, Rome 1867, p. 37; R. P. Anastase, “La Secte Des Yezidis”, *Les Missions Catholiques*, Tome Trente-Unièm: Janvier-Décembre 1899, p. 551.

¹⁹ BOA. Mühimme Defteri nr. 31, p. 195, hkm. 438.

²⁰ Kâtip Çelebi, *Fezleke (Osmanlı Tarihi (1000-1065/1591-1655))*, C.II, Prep.: Zeynep Aycıbin, Çamlıca Yayınları, İstanbul 2016, p. 1043. (evâhir-i şaban 1061).

Unfortunately, these positive relations that began between the Ottoman state administration and the Yezidi notables did not continue in the same direction between the Muslims and the Yezidi communities, the inhabitants of the region, and disagreements began to arise between the Yezidis and the Muslims, and after a while these disagreements gave way to hatred based on violent fanaticism. For a Yazidi, the act of killing a Muslim is of paramount importance and holds significant value. Nevertheless, for a Muslim, death at the hands of a Yazidi is regarded as martyrdom. This situation is noteworthy in terms of demonstrating the extent of social segregation and hatred between the two groups. For this reason, from time immemorial, the governors of Diyarbakır, Mosul and Mardin have selected Yezidis to perform the executions. A Yazidi leader selects an individual for a six-month tenure on this assignment, with the entire Yazidi community offering their services with considerable enthusiasm. Upon completion of their duty, the Yazidi executioners returned home, esteemed by their community. They were regarded with admiration and affection, and many sought to interact with them. In the event that a few drops of Muslim blood were spilled on their garments during the course of their duties, the blood-stained cloth was subsequently divided into pieces, with each piece distributed among the populace as a revered relic²¹.

Mosul Yezidis and Trade

Mosul is the most populous city in the region where Yezidis are concentrated. Mosul plays a significant role in the transit trade of European goods destined for or originating from the Far East and countries such as India. Pagnozzi (1820s) asserted that Mosul was the second largest foreign trade depot of the Turkish empire. All goods, including fabrics, linen, medicines and other items, originating from the Indian subcontinent and transported via Basra and Baghdad, were routed through Mosul. They were then distributed to various cities in Anatolia and ultimately reached Istanbul. Similarly, some of the goods originating from Iran were also distributed throughout the Ottoman Empire via Mosul. Mosul, which occupied a pivotal role in the Ottoman foreign trade

²¹ Auguste Wahlen, Mœurs, *Usages Et Costumes De Tous Les Peuples Du Monde: D'après Des Documents And Authentiques Et Les Voyages Des Plus Récents*, Bruxelles 1843, p. 533; M. Baptistin Poujoulat, *Voyage dans l'Asie Mineure en Mésopotamie, à Palmyre, en Syrie, en Palestine et en Égypte: faisant suite à la correspondance d'Orient*, Volume I, Paris 1840, p. 359-360.

network, was also supplied by Baghdad, Aleppo and cities in eastern Anatolia. Wool, manna, tobacco, rubber and beeswax were transported to Mosul from Eastern Anatolia, while cotton was imported from neighbouring cities. European goods and those from Aleppo were also imported. A considerable quantity of woollen tunics worn by Arabs was transported to Mosul from Baghdad, along with a substantial amount of old copper from Syria for export to the Indies. Additionally, Mosul's strategic location near Iran made it a primary destination for merchants from this region. Notably, a variety of dried and fresh grapes are traded from the Iranian area, utilized by Mosul's Muslim and Christian communities, respectively, for the production of must and brandy/raki²². Mosul not only functioned as a conduit for industrial consumer goods from abroad, but also demonstrated a robust industrial production dynamic, evident in the numerous workshops that flourished within the city. During the early nineteenth century, these workshops were responsible for the production of a considerable quantity of fabric and textiles, which were transported by caravans to Aleppo and subsequently to Italy and Europe. The commercial activities in Mosul were conducted by a diverse array of merchants, representing various ethnic backgrounds, including Turks, Kurds, Arabs, Armenians, Yezidis, and Armenians²³.

Trade and trade-related business are abhorrent to them. According to the Yezidis, to engage in trade is to expose oneself to lies, betrayal or deception, cursing, swearing and humiliation. In addition, all this leads Yezidis to hide and conceal their identity. According to Nadra Moutran, this situation brings them the religious curse of the angel Tavus. For this reason, the majority of Yezidis in Syria have turned to agriculture rather than trade²⁴. It should not be forgotten, however, that agricultural activity is the first step towards commercial activity. One of the main reasons why the Yezidis do not engage in commercial activity is that they do not want to be in dialogue with Muslim and Christian elements who do not like them. In any case, according to Lady

22 G.R. Pagnozzi, *Geografia Moderna Universale Ovvero Descrizione Fisica, Statistica, Topografica Di Tutti I Paesi Conosciuti Della Terra*, Volume Primo Decimoquinto Ed Ultimo Introduzione, E Asia Occidentale. 1, Firenze 1822, p. 196.

23 G.R. Pagnozzi, *ibid*, p. 196.

24 Nadra Moutran, *La Syrie de Demain: France et Syrie, Syrie Proprement dite, Gouvernement et, France Et Syrie Syrie Proprement Ute Gouvernement Et Administration Religions Et Races*, Paris 1916, p. 423.

Dorothy Mills, the necessities of trade force them to live in outward friendship with their Jewish and Muslim neighbours²⁵. The Yezidis' different religious understanding between Muslims and Christians was one of the factors that led them to prefer banditry and looting to agriculture and especially trade. Their banditry had a negative impact on the commercial activities of the city of Mosul, especially during the periods when the authority of the Ottoman Empire was weakened by wars and other reasons. From time to time, Yezidis and other nomads prevented trade in Mosul and tried to loot the city..²⁶ It is postulated that the Yezidis divested themselves of some of the assets they acquired through looting and plunder via a network of intermediaries.

Agriculture and Animal Husbandry in Yezidis

One of the main livelihoods of the Yezidis living in and around Mosul is animal husbandry. Both the breeding and sale of animals and the trade in animal products were important sources of income. In fact, in 1837, the Yezidis in Tal Afar were reported to be keeping mainly sheep, goats, mules and mares. At that time, Mirza Pasha travelled to the region due to some public order and tax collection problems in the region, and as a result of this movement, he captured 5,000 black sheep, goats and lambs, as well as 400 mares, mules and foals from the Yezidis for tax purposes. The Yezidis also kidnapped around 1,600 mules, mares and many sheep to avoid paying taxes²⁷. On the same day, Hafiz Pasha's operation in the Sinjar region resulted in the capture of 30,000 sheep²⁸. As can be seen, the animals kept by the Yezidis are small cattle. It is worth noting, however, that they also raise big-tailed and black sheep.

Yezidis residing in the settlements surrounding Mosul typically engaged in agricultural and animal husbandry activities. They would then transport their surplus livestock or animal products, such as butter, cheese, and eggs,

²⁵ Lady Dorothy Mills, *Beyond the Bosphorus*, London 1922, p. 200.

²⁶ G. Dumoutier, *Annales Du Musée Guimet Bibliothèque De Vulgarisation Les Symboles Les Emblemes Et Les Accessoires Du Culte Chez Les Annamites*, Paris 1891, pp. 160-170.

²⁷ BOA. HAT. 448/22332 (13 Rebiülevvel 1253 – 17 Haziran 1837).

²⁸ Carl Ritter, *Die Erdkunde im Verhältniss zur Natur und zur Geschichte des Menschen: Oder Allgemeine Vergleichende Geographie, Als Sichere Grundlage Des Studiums Und Unterrichts In Physikalischen Und Historischen Wissenschaften*, Berlin 1844, pp. 450-452.

to Mosul, a nearby trade center, where they would sell them²⁹. It has been documented that sheep of the Yezidi breed, when brought to the Mosul market, are characterised by the notable size of their tails³⁰. The practice of livestock breeding has had a significant impact on the economic and social structures of societies around the world, and even on the architectural structures of the houses in which people live. In this context, the huts of the Yezidis are earth-roofed houses constructed on the precipitous slopes of the Sinjar mountains. The lower floor of these houses is typically wider than the upper floor, and the roof of the lower floor often functions as a courtyard for the upper floor. The lower section of these structures was primarily utilized for the shelter of animals³¹. In the vicinity of Sinjar, nomadic peoples retreated to caves in the mountains during the winter season. When the weather improved, they dispersed across the Mesopotamian plains, establishing temporary encampments where they could tend to their livestock and engage in opportunistic raiding of passing caravans³². Yezidis residing in neighbouring villages sell their sheep and the products of their livestock to caravans traversing Amediyeh, Kirkuk and other cities situated beyond Mosul³³.

The Sinjar region plays a pivotal role in the agricultural activities of the Yezidis in the Mosul region. The region has historically served as a vital refuge

29 Marco Musizzano, *Reminiscenze Di Un Viaggio in Asia Negli Anni 1861-62*, Torino 1863, pp. 147-148.; Carl Ritter, *ibid*, pp. 450-452.

30 G.R. Pagnozzi, *ibid*, p. 203.

31 Carl Ritter, *ibid*, pp. 450-452.

32 Alessandro de Bianchi, *Viaggi in Armenia, Kurdistan e Lazistan*, Milano 1865, p. 245; "Account of The Extraordinary Sect Called Yezidis" *Analectic Magazine*, For August, 1813, p. 170; "Account of the Extraordinary Sect called Yezidis" *The Analectic Magazine, Containing Selections from Foreign Reviews and Magazines, of such Articles as are Most Valuable, Curious, or Entertaining*, Vol. II., Philadelphia 1813, p. 170; "Account of the Extraordinary Sect called Yezidis; from the Italian of Father Garzoni, who resided eighteen years in Kurdistan as a Missionary. This account was originally published by the Abbate Domenico Sestini, at Berlin in the year 1807, among a collection of Italian Works, entitled, " Viaggi e opuscoli diversi &c." *The Classical Journal; for March and June, 1813*. London 1813, p. 145; J. Shiel, "Notes on a Journey from Tabriz, Through Kurdistan, via Van, Bitlis, Se'ert and Erbil, to Suleimaniyeh, in July and August, 1836", *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, Vol. 8. (1838), p. 95; Viscount Pollington, Notes on a Journey from Erz-Rum, by Mush, Diyar-Bekr, and Bireh-jik, to Aleppo, in June, 1838, *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, Vol. 10. (1840), p. 447-448; William Francis Ainsworth, *Travels and Researches in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea and Armenia c II*, Londra 1842, p.189.

33 G.R. Pagnozzi, *ibid*, p. 199.

for the Yezidis, offering a multitude of caves and natural shelters. Concurrently, the region's arid and rocky terrain renders it an inaccessible and challenging location, making it a refuge for Yezidis fleeing banditry. The remoteness of this area makes it difficult for the state to deploy troops³⁴. Indeed, during the 1830s, when the Yezidis in the region were subjected to persecution due to their reputation as bandits, they sought refuge in the caves of this mountain range, making them a particularly challenging target for capture. The region was designated by the state as a "thieves' base," or *mevâ-yı lüsûs*³⁵. Southgate states that this was a location where the Yezidis congregated in significant numbers, engaging in activities such as looting, murder, and social disruption. Following these actions, they retreated to their mountainous caves³⁶. Some sources indicate that it was a refuge where they sought protection from their enemies³⁷. While Sinjar was historically significant for the Yezidis, it can be postulated that they commenced agricultural activities in this area concurrently with their initial settlement.

The inhabitants of the south-eastern slopes of Mount Sinjar are a mixed population, comprising Yezidis and Muslims³⁸. Given that they do not reside in cities or large towns due to their beliefs, their occupations are primarily related to agriculture. The majority of Yezidis in Mosul are engaged in agricultural activities. Nevertheless, a considerable proportion of the agricultural land they cultivate is under the control of Muslim beys or

³⁴ BOA. AE.SMHD.I. 132/9720 (evâsıt-ı Ramazan 1166 – 20 Temmuz 1753).

³⁵ The route to the caves is via a narrow and challenging stony passageway, which is over half an hour in length. Some of the caves can be accessed via an entrance at the top, which is reached by climbing a ladder. In other cases, an entrance is located at a lower level, which can be reached by descending a rope. In other words, it is not feasible to occupy this location with military forces. HAT. 1333/51988 (20 Safer 1253 – 26 Mayıs 1837); HAT. 1264/48950 (05 Rebiülevvel 1253 – 9 Haziran 1837).

³⁶ Horatio Southgate., *Narrative of a tour through Armenia, Kurdistan, Persia and Mesopotamia: with an introduction, and occasional observations upon the condition of Moham-medanism and Christianity in those countries*, Vol. II, London MDCCCXL, s. 263-264; Evliya Çelebi, *Günümüz Türkçesiyle Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnamesi: Bağdad - Basra - Bitlis - Diyarbakır - İsfahan - Malatya - Mardin – Musul Tebriz – Van*, 4. Kitap 1. Cilt, Hazırlayanlar: Seyit Ali Kahraman - Yücel Dağlı, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, İstanbul 2010, p. 95.

³⁷ "Asie Turque", *Abrégé des Voyages Modernes Depuis 1780 Jusqu'à Nos Jours*, by M. Eyriès, Paris 1824, pp. 267-268; A. Paternmann, *Mittheilungen Aus Justus Perthes' Geographischer Anstalt Wichtige Neue Erforschungen Auf Dem Gesamtgebiete Der Geographie*, *Ergänzungsband X*, 1875-1876, Gotha: Justus Perthes 1876, p. 6.

³⁸ *Musul – Kerkük İle İlgili Arşiv Belgeleri (1525 – 1919)*, T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı Yayın Nu: 11, Ankara 1993, p. 30.

Christian merchants, who collectively own the majority of the lands and even villages within the city³⁹.

A total of seventeen villages are located in the area, nine on the north side of the mountain and eight on the south side, which is oriented towards the qibla. Some of these villages are of considerable size, with two to three hundred households. The villages of Bekran, Yufsan, Kendekli, Alîdina, Fukra, Umran, Mahrese, Golkar, Derice and Semuka are located in the northern region, while the town centre of Beled and the villages of Kizilkent, Kabare, Jidale, Kiran, Semuka, Hatuniye, Narnemyuk, Mendegan, Ayn al-ghazal, Mehergan, Tepe, Muhammad Sayig hamlet, Haji Bey and Kabus are situated in the southern region. Of these settlements, Beled town and the villages of Kabare, Mendegan, Rabi, Hedale, Hatuniye, Narnemyuk and Ayn al-Ghazal are all predominantly Muslim. The remaining villages are predominantly inhabited by Yezidis. The Muslim and Yazidi inhabitants of Kiran, Semuka, Mendegan and Ayn al-gazal villages are engaged in animal husbandry. Consequently, they reside in tents from spring to autumn, while in other seasons they live in their villages. Additionally, the region boasts the mausoleum of Şerafeddin, one of the Atabey's lords, and the mausoleum of the revered saint Rumî, regarded as one of the saints of the saints. These sites also serve as significant pilgrimage destinations for the Yezidis. Wheat, barley, lentil, chickpea, sumac and sesame crops are the principal crops cultivated in the kaza and its settlements. Additionally, the kaza is home to a variety of other fruit trees, including walnut, mulberry, and apple. The figs of Mount Sinjar, which were not commonly cultivated in the Ottoman Empire, are now grown in abundance. Furthermore, it is suitable for export in very large quantities on an annual basis. Furthermore, cotton cultivation, which is of particular importance for the textile industry, represents a significant source of income for the Yezidis in Sinjar⁴⁰. The yarns obtained during Hafız Pasha's campaign in this region indicate that the Yezidis were engaged in the production of yarn⁴¹. Furthermore, it is established that olive trees are present in the region inhabited by Yezidis and Yacoubis in Bashîqa⁴².

39 The Missionary Herald 1892-04: Vol 88, Issue 4, p. 76; Frédéric Le Blanc Hackluya, *Histoire de l'islamisme et des sectes qui s'y rattachent*, Paris 1852, p. 114.

40 *Osmanlı Vilayet Salnamelerinde Musul*, Editörler: Cengiz Eroğlu Murat Babuçoğlu Orhan Özdi, Orsam Yayınları, Ankara 2012, p.156-159.

41 Carl Ritter, *ibid*, pp. 450-452.

42 J. Baillie Fraser, *Mesopotamia and Assyria, from The Earliest Ages to The Present Time; With Illustrations of Their Natural History*, Edinburg & London 1841, p. 169.

Grape cultivation plays an important role in the agricultural activities of Yezidis. The Yezidis transported a variety of grapes and mulberries to the Mosul market, where they were sold⁴³. Evliya Çelebi commends the diversity and renown of grapes cultivated in Sinjar, as evidenced by the following observation: It is evident that this humble servant, Evliya, has not had the opportunity to observe the diverse range of grape varieties cultivated in various vineyards during his 41 years of travel⁴⁴. Indeed, as Evliya Çelebi's findings indicate, the Ottoman documents of the period also reflect the fact that Yezidis were engaged in viticulture⁴⁵. In addition to grapes, the Yezidis cultivate a modest assortment of figs, which are highly regarded in the surrounding region⁴⁶. The isolated Sinjar mountains (Sangrades), which dominate the arid desert plains and lie between Mosul and Khabur, are characterised by a rich diversity of fruit trees, including date palms, figs, pomegranates, plums, mulberries and vines. The inhabitants of Mardin, Mosul and Baghdad purchase figs, plums, pomegranates and dates from the Yezidis, who harvest these crops in abundance from the mountains where they reside⁴⁷. Some sources indicate that the Yezidis have no need for wheat from their neighbours, given the abundance of fruit grown in this region. It is emphasised that the apricots, grapes and figs cultivated by the Yezidis are of the highest quality in Iraq⁴⁸. The culinary traditions of the Yezidis are largely confined to economic activities and the agricultural products they cultivate. The diet of the Yezidis is largely comprised of dairy products, meat, barley bread, and a limited selection of fruits⁴⁹.

This area of Mosul, which is of great significance to the Yezidis, extends in a southward direction, with a gradual incline to the east and west. The area in question is approximately 50 miles in length and 7 to 9 miles in width⁵⁰. In

⁴³ Carl Ritter, *ibid*, p. 450-452.

⁴⁴ Evliya Çelebi, *ibid*, p. 95.

⁴⁵ BOA. HAT. 41/2088 (29 Zilhicce 1216 – 2 Mayıs 1802).

⁴⁶ Horatio Southgate., *ibid*, pp. 263-264.

⁴⁷ G.R. Pagnozzi, *ibid*, p. 191.

⁴⁸ "Asie Turque", *ibid*, pp. 267-268.

⁴⁹ J. S. Buckingham, *Travels In Mesopotamia, Including A Journey From Aleppo to Bagdad, By The Route Of Beer, Orfah, Diarbekr, Mardin, & Mousul; With Researches on The Ruins of Nineveh, Babylon, and Other Ancient Cities*, Vol. I, Henry Colburn, New Burlington Street, London 1827, pp. 204-205.

⁵⁰ *Cyprus And Asiatic Turkey A Handy General Description Of Our New Eastern Protectorate From*, *The English Cyclopædia*, *With A Map.*, London 1878, p. 165.

other words, the distance of Mount Sinjar is 14 hours in length and four hours in width⁵¹. In the lower and flatter areas of Sinjar, a substantial quantity of wheat, barley and cotton are cultivated. The slopes of Mount Sinjar and the surrounding hills are densely populated with fig trees and vineyards, which provide a significant export product. Some of the hills are covered with oak trees. The population of Yezidis in the region exceeds 6,000 individuals. The plain situated between the hills of Mount Sinjar and the Tigris river is characterised by an undulating surface and a scarcity of vegetation, with only a small amount of coarse grass and thorny bushes present. There are extensive areas of arid, saline-enriched soil. The most prevalent form of vegetable production is oat grass, which in numerous instances blankets vast expanses of land, to the extent that all other plant life is effectively excluded, with the exception of a few flowering species. Agriculture is practised in only a few locations, namely along the beds of temporary watercourses situated between low rocky ridges. The crops cultivated in these areas are wheat and barley. In some instances, the roadways are lined with wormwood. The cultivated areas are more extensive in the vicinity of the Tigris. The river in question flows through a valley that is between eight and ten miles in width. Naturally occurring grasses and small tamarisk trees are present on the protruding headlands surrounding the river. These areas are characterised by a fertile alluvial soil, which offers considerable potential for the cultivation of abundant crops. The availability of sufficient water resources enabled the cultivation of grain and rice in the region through the construction of extensive embankments. As one proceeds in a southerly direction from Mosul, the number of cultivated areas declines due to the prevalence of incursions by marauding parties targeting the agricultural population⁵².

It seems reasonable to posit that they returned with the materials they had not found or needed in their own regions. When Yezidis arrived in Mosul for commercial purposes, their beliefs occasionally placed them in a challenging position. The Muslim and Christian shopkeepers of the city, aware of the Yezidis' reverence for the devil, resorted to cursing them with the intention of placing them in a challenging situation or merely for their own amusement. This resulted in the Yezidis being compelled to relinquish their belongings, a decision met with considerable displeasure⁵³.

51 BOA. HAT. 1333/51988 (20 Safer 1253 – 26 Mayıs 1837).

52 *Cyprus And Asiatic Turkey...*, p. 165.

53 Marco Musizzano, *ibid*, pp. 147-148; Horatio Southgate, *ibid*, p. 308; A. Patermann, *ibid*, p. 12.

Some of the villages where the Yezidis were engaged in agricultural activities are included in the scope of timar and zeamet. In the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the Murzi and Zibari clans of the Kurds of the Imadiya government and the Sheikhan Yezidis, with the permission of their rulers, settled in the Ayn-Sefine district of Mosul by force. Subsequently, a significant conflict emerged between the Kurds and the Yezidis in the region. The disputes escalated into violent confrontations, resulting in the deaths of 100 Kurds and 50 Yezidis. The Yezidis of these opposing communities launched attacks on each other's villages and were unable to resist, resulting in their forced displacement and the destruction of their neighbourhoods by fire. Subsequently, they took up residence in the villages of Bahishka and Bahzan, which were among the timar and zeamet villages of Mosul, as well as six villages in close proximity to these. It seems likely that these Yazidi communities were engaged in agricultural activities in the period following their settlement in timar and zeamet lands⁵⁴. It is also documented that some Yezidis are engaged in the practice of rafting passengers and caravans across the Zab River in Mosul province⁵⁵.

The City of Mosul as a Missionary Settlement

Because the people of Mosul were of different ethnic origins and belonged to different sects and faiths, the city became a magnet for missionaries. In this context, Mosul was a city where Protestants, Catholics and many other denominations either had members or mission stations. The missionaries saw the Yezidis living in and around Mosul as close to them, and so the area became a centre of attraction for them. Among these groups, the Jacobites, Nestorians and Chaldeans in particular represented a unique opportunity for them⁵⁶. Badre, home to important Yazidi settlements and mirs (beys), is in the

⁵⁴ BOA. İE.DH. 17/1569 (29 Zilhicce 1117 – 13 Nisan 1706); Mühimme Defteri nr. 115, p. 74, hkm. 294, 295 and 296; BOA. İE.DH. 21/1941 (evasıt-ı Cemaziyelevvel 1118 – Ağustos 1706).

⁵⁵ Marco Musizzano, *ibid*, pp. 147-148.

⁵⁶ Jules Oppert, *Expédition scientifique en Mésopotamie exécutée par ordre du gouvernement de 1851 à 1854 par mm. Fulgence Fresnel, Félix Thomas et Jules Oppert publiée sous les auspices de son excellence*, Tome I, Relation du voyage et résultats de l'expédition, Paris MDCCCLVIII, p.75; Horatio Southgate, *ibid*, p. 263-264; M. l'abbé P. Martin, *ibid*, p. 46.

Mosul region⁵⁷. The Yezidis are bound by tradition to make an annual visit to their sheikh in the Mosul region, during which they present him with the highest level of gift (ala deven). Mosul is also a destination for pilgrimage, as well as the location of numerous religious shrines⁵⁸.

Mosul and its surroundings, which had been important to the ancient Christians, became more important after the existence of the Yezidis became known and Catholic missionaries set up a station in Mosul to recruit them to their sect. In this way, they not only introduced the Yezidis to the outside world⁵⁹, but also translated their holy book, Musafı Reş, the Black Book, and introduced it to Europe⁶⁰. Catholic missions remained in Mosul until the First World War, while Protestant missions continued in some form until the Arab-Israeli wars⁶¹.

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- 57 Victor Dixgelstedt, "The Yezids", *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, Volume XIV, Edinburgh 1898, p. 302.
- 58 BOA. A.MKT. 212/42 (17.08.1265 – 8 Temmuz 1849). See. The sheikhs collect these treats and convey them to Sheikh Adi, the destination of their visit, where they expend them in accordance with established custom. Kaval İlyas and Kaval Yusuf's uncles, Sheikh Kaval and Hızır and his son Hacı and their companion İlyas, had been travelling to the Yazidis in Iran and Russia for three years. Following visits to their places of residence, They arrived in the village of Hulafa in Bitlis, where they were killed in 1262 by individuals named Ferho (also known as Ferso or Kırho/Fırho), who was the keyhesi (or steward) of the village of Solak, and the süluku agha. Kaval İlyas was able to evade capture by finding an opportunity to do so. The perpetrators appropriated a considerable quantity of valuables, including 200 pieces of Mecidiye gold, 10 pieces of Mahmudiye gold, 100 pieces of gold, 700 pieces of five, two mares, one bargir, one horse, seven rugs, seven felt, 300 pairs of socks, 100 Persian handkerchiefs, 100 duha pouches and akçe pouches, from the victims. It was requested that their cases be heard in the presence of Asad Pasha, the governor of Kurdistan, in accordance with the principles of Islamic law.
- 59 Revue Mensuelle, *Religieuse, Politique, Scientifique*, Faisant Suite A La Publication, No:16, Avrill 1895, 2 Anne, p. 219.
- 60 John S. Guest, *Yezidilerin Tarihi Meleké Tawus ve Mishefa Reş'in İzinde*, trans. İbrahim Bingöl, Avesta Yayınları, İstanbul 2001, p. 262-265; Count Arrigo Manzza De' Neri, "The Once Secret Scriptures of The Yezidis, The So-Called Devil-Worshippers of Kurdistan", *The Quest A Quarterly Review. Volume, V. Numbers 1-4. October, 1913, to July, 1914*. Edited by G. R. S. Mead, London 1914, pp. 20-23.
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Conclusion

In Iraq, Mosul, along with Baghdad, is the most important commercial and agricultural city in the region. For the Yezidis living around the city, especially in the Sinjar region, Mosul is a market where they sell their agricultural and animal products. It is also the main city that allows them to open up to the outside world, where they can buy the materials, they do not produce and do not need. Despite its commercial importance, the biggest obstacle for the Yezidis not to settle in the city centre and not to engage in trade is that trade with Jews, Christians and Muslims poses a great risk for their beliefs. This situation caused them to concentrate more on agriculture, animal husbandry and banditry activities. In addition, this situation prevented them from commercial, social and religious integration with other communities in their geography and caused them to retreat to sheltered areas such as the Sinjar Mountains.

It is a generally accepted fact in the world that humanity has developed through agriculture and trade. In this situation, the fact that religious sensitivities do not look favourably on trade is of great importance in the fact that the Yezidis cannot develop as a culture and civilization and remain a closed society within themselves. Thus, while other nations developed in the field of civilization, the Yezidis remained outside the change of the outside world. However, missionary organizations and missionaries, initially established in Mosul for local Christians, became the Yezidis' gateway to the outside world. Thanks to the missionaries, the Yezidis were in contact with foreign states through the consuls in Mosul. Today, it is believed that these perceptions have begun to change commercially.

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